Maude Puckette Nodwell

THE SHACK

Chapter 1. Marion.

Marion carried little Annie out and helped them off. Her parents, Jerry and Glory, were going to town and taking the baby Annie, with them. Marion was to take care of the other children and the place while they were gone. She stood watching them until the old rattling democrat went from sight around the point at the lake, shielding her eyes from the bright morning sun with her arms; then she went inside locking the screen behind her.

She spoke to John who sat listlessly in a chair staring through the back door which was directly across the room from the one that she had just come through.

"I should have just kept Annie here". She began scraping and stacking plates. The breakfast table sat as they had left it when they finished the hurried meal. "It's going to be too hot for her out there on the trail, why it's almost seventy now. She is such a sweet child, just like a little angel, isn't she, Johnnie, in her little white hoodie and booties?"

"I don't know" John muttered lazily "but she's better off there than here, we got the' twins to mind."

"Oh my goodness gracious sakes alive I forgot all about them. There's no telling where they are or what they are doing. I declare, they can think of more mischief than a dozen ordinary children. It's a good thing I'm almost thirteen or I couldn't stand this."

She ran across the large dim room that served as living

room, dining room, and kitchen, to the back door, then she paused and gasped.

"Just like I thought. There they are on the top pole of the corral. Go and get them Johnnie, those children will be the death of me yet."

John hurried out and she waited at the door until he dragged them inside. Then she locked the screen and turned on them fiercely.

"Why do you go near that corral?" she stormed, "some day you're going to fall in, then you'll be sorry. Why do you climb the fence? Why do you do it?"

"We were feeding bread to the colts. "Eric returned Marion's frowning stare. "If we don't climb up, they kick dirt in our eyes."

"They wike bread" Edwin spoke up boldly, but he stood back out of reach and poised ready for flight.

"Well", Marion struggled to keep her face grim, "I'll let you off this time but stop away from those colts, they're mean, I say, you'll fall in, then they'll gallop right over you."

"Why don't you make them sit in a chair and not move for ten minutes, like you did me that time?" John asked scornfully, "you never make them mind."

"Now Johnnie", Marion warned, "remember, Jerry told me to take care of the twins, not you." She turned back to the littered table. But she frowned again on the twins. "You got to stop inside now, for punishment. Come Johnnie dry the dishes so we can get off to the lake."

"Aw, do I gotta wipe dishes?" John grumbled, but took the dish towel that Marion brought from the pantry. "That's girl's work."

"You should say dry not wipe dishes", Marion scolded "and besides you know what Jerry says about what's girl's work and what's boy's work. He says when there's work to do why do it, no matter---Marion's voice became plaintive. "Johnnie, I help you lots of times with your chores."

"Awright, get started or we won't get to the lake all day."

"Pick up your toys".Marion looked back over her shoulder just as the twins began to wind the gramophone. "Put that record back or you'll break it,then you'll answer to Jerry. Put it back I say--there now, that's the good little boys. Now pick up the toys so we can have a picnic."

"Oh, a picnic!" Eric cried, and he began throwing toys towards a box which sat near the back door. "A picnic!"

"And wemonade", Edwin shouted, "wemonade!" He started pushing blocks and other toys towards the box with his foot.

"You shall have your lemonade too", Marion beamed, "If you're good little boys."

She turned back nervously to place a cup in the draining pan and it slipped from her soap-covered hands,crashing to the floor.

"Oh mercy!" she gasped, "a blue one, out of the new set. How will I ever tell Glory?" She picked the pieces up handing them to John. "Throw them behind the pig pen Johnnie and maybe--oh, I don't mean that. Put them in the

play house. I'll tell Glory the minute she gets home, of course I will."

"Soon's I get big enough," John had resumed his dish drying, "I'm gonna stop school and get me a job an' help Jerry pay off the m--"

"Johnnie!" Marion cried, her blue eyes wide, "don't ever mention the--it before the twins, remember even we aren't supposed to know about it."

"I forgot" John hung his head, then suddenly Marion realized what he had said.

"You can't quit school for Glory has her heart set on us all going to college. You know that."

"There ain't time to go to college, potato nose will have the place before that."

"Johnnie O'Malley," Marion chided "will you please stop saying ain't? Always say isn't or aren't. But there will be time too. Mr. White says it's worth waiting years to get, if we really want to be great."

"I don't care if I'm great or not", John declared, "just so we save the place. What I can't stand is old potato nose will get the colts too and the things here in the house, even the dishes--I heard him and Jerry quarreling about--"

"He won't get Glory's silk crazy quilt", Marion said hotly, "I'll hide it first, that I will."

"But Johnny," Marion noticed that he was downcast, "don't you worry. Jerry says the summerfallow will pay er--it off and enough left over to build the new house. Then we can have things nice too, as well as the Bradfords, and have

folks out from town to eat."

"We have them already," John said, "prairie chicken season."

"They come because Jerry lets them hunt over the stubble and because Glory asks them to eat and fixes up good meals for them. I see them looking around at our crowded bed-room and this dingy--Oh, I get so mad. I am sick and tired of this old cook stove that leaks ashes on the floor, the old davenport that sags, the torn linoleum with braided rugs to hide the holes, the oilcloth table cloth, the old smoky lamps, the homemade table and bookcase--"

"W'y Marion," John exclaimed, "I never heard you talk like that before. I like our house--anyhow it's warm."

"I didn't mean to let you know--I just have to talk sometimes or--" Marion scalded the dish pan and hung it outside close to the back door above the table where the milk pail and pans were sunning.

"Well Johnnie, " Marion sighed, "it just can't freeze us out this year. I believe like Jerry--or--I try to, even Glory says some way will be provided. We just gotta have that new house, and new varnished furniture. Then, I won't have to war faded dresses to Bradford's and feel like Mrs. Bradford's eyes are boring holes in my back when I start home." She took the broom from the nails where it hung behind the back door, "Now you boys run along and turn the cows out and be sure you shut the pasture gate, Johnnie, so they won't get out, and I'll be fixing the lunch."

John went whistling off to the cow barn with the twins skipping joyfully behind him. Marion had just begun fogging the dirt across the room when she heard a timid knock at the door. She dropped the broom and ran to see who it was.

"Oh, it's you Nellie," she opened the screen wide for her to enter, "I'm that glad you came. They've gone to town and took little Annie, and we're having a picnic at the lake."

"How fortunate I got here before you left". Nellie laid her wide white hat on the table and sat down, "I wouldn't have had any idea where to find you. Mother and Father have gone to town too, there is a council meeting."

"Jerry's going to it too." Marion picked the broom up and leaned against it, her face pressed against the finger marked handle.

"Mother said I could stop over here all day." Nellie said serenely, "may be we can pick some flowers. The violets and buttercups are out and some of the roses."

"The ladyslippers too." Marion's face shone, "We'll go hunting them too. I'm not done the work yet," Marion apologized.

Marion glanced enviously at Nelly's new pink voile dress and back at her own faded print, and again she had a hot feeling of resentment. She must wear faded print while Nellie had ruffles and lace and a long ribbon sash. Nellie could have patent leather slippers while her old shoes --oh, I mustn't be jealous, it's wicked, she thought.

Marion hurried to finish the sweeping, then began making sandwiches of cold roast beef and homemade bread and butter. She brought some cakes from the pantry. "Look," she said brightly, "Glory made us some cup cakes and frosted them white."

"They look delicious," Nellie exclaimed. "Oh, if I could only bake like that but mother wants me to keep my hands nice so I can be a fine musician."

Marion kept her eyes down. It wouldn't do at all for Nellie to see how she longed to learn to play the piano. "Anybody could make those cup cakes" she said carelessly, "it's the recipe I used last fall when I took first at the school fair. It takes real talent to be a musician."

"Mother says you have talent", Nelly said guardedly. "She'd like to give you lessons if--"she dropped her dark eyes, embarrassed.

"If we had a piano", Marion said eagerly. "Well we are going to have one when we build our new house next summer." She lifted her chin bravely, she must make Nellie think she believed it.

"My father said it was a crying shame the way you folks planned each summer to build a new house and something always happened to the crop to set you back and give the banker another mortgage..."

"Oh," Marion cried, "I didn't know anybody knew about the mortgage." She sat down and leaned her face on the table, her hands pressed over her eyes. "I'm

that ashamed." Her two long dark braids fell over her shoulders.

"But you don't need to be, Marion. My father says that your father is the bravest man he ever knew to stick it out in spite of the compound interest. Look at the Murpheys now--"

"But Mr. Murphey was a drunkard," Marion sat up straight now. She must hold her head up in spite of everything, "it wasn't only frozen wheat that put them off their place and into a shack on the railroad right-of-way. Just think how awful it would be for Jerry to have to do section work, and all the farm and everything done." Marion began to sob bitterly.

"I shouldn't of mentioned it, " Nellie said contritely, "only I like you and I'm your best friend and want you to like me."

"I already do," Marion dried her eyes on her apron and walked to the door. "I wish those boys would hurry, no telling where they are."

"Here they come now, " Nelly was looking over her shoulder, "I wish I had dear little brothers and sisters like them."

"They make you lots of work," Marion glanced at the toys still on the floor where she had pushed them with her broom when she swept, "lots and lots of work."

"I get lonely, I wouldn't mind the work," Nellie complained, "with nothing but my music and dolls. Marion, I'm too large to play with dolls but mother insists

that I must. She did when she was 13." She smoothed her short golden hair back primly and touched her crisp pink ribbon unconsciously.

"She doesn't realize how times have changed," Marion said sagely.

"I think I'll give some of my dolls to Annie next Christmas," Nellie said. "You know, she's just like little Alice was in the home. She cried so hard when mother adopted me and took me away. I used to tell her stories and put her to bed every night."

"Why didn't they adopt her too?" Marion turned in surprise. "I would of--wouldn't you?"

"Yes--yes I would." Nellie hesitated, then continued recklessly, "I got mother to take me back once--with a doll for her but---she was--she was--she had died with measles." Nellie dropped her face in her hands and tears began to run down between her fingers.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," Marion exclaimed, "and I was envying you your pretty dresses." She ran to the chest for handkerchiefs. "I guess it hurt you as much as if it--but I couldn't stand to lose little Annie."

The boys came trooping in shouting that they were ready to start to the lake. Their round cheeks red from exercise, their eyes dancing with mischief.

"You carry the lemonade, Johnnie," Marion said huskily, "mind now, it's heavy. Don't drop it and break Glory's glass jug."

"Hurry now," John warned, "or we'll beat you to the

lake." He and the twins went on out but John walked slowly. He was wondering about the girls and their red eyes. What could they have been crying about on a bright spring day like this? Marion and Nelly hurried after them. Each of them carried a bucket of lunch. They were happy again now that they were out in the sunshine too. Marion kept watching the boys on the path ahead with Buster, the shaggy black and white shepherd dog, trotting lazily behind. She looked up at the blue sky and sighed happily. But she quickened her steps.

"We must catch them," she said breathlessly, "can you walk any faster? I'm afraid if they start over the corduroy bridge one of them might fall in the coulee."

"He is waiting," Nellie said. "John is, so don't rush too much with these heavy pails." She called out then, "wait and I'll take one of the twins across."

But neither of them would go with Nellie, they clung to John and crossed ahead of the girls. Nellie went next, then Marion, and each step she felt might be her last.

The bridge which was made of green unpeeled logs tied together with a thick matting of hay and brush between it and the blue mud of the coulee, quivered and shook at every step.

When they reached the other side Nellie exclaimed, "Why Marion, you're white as a sheet. What scared you?"

"I'm always scared of the coulee, and that shaking bridge." Marion set the pail down for a minute to rest.

"We had a calf mire down it once and before Jerry could get a rope it was gone, clear out of sight in the blue mud. It was awful. You know, we used to cross the coulee by jumping from one bunch of slough grass to another, but Jerry made the bridge after the calf went down. Of course if we want to walk to the point where they have the picnics we wouldn't have to cross the coulee at all."

"It doesn't look that dangerous," Nellie looked at the flat waste of grass grown marsh. "It's pretty with all those little pools of water, and the tall grass and cattails and those sweet pussy willows all in bloom."

"We must hurry," Marion started on, "or the boys will have the boat out, and I promised Jerry we wouldn't go out in it when he isn't with us. Since that man drowned last summer, he and Glory are afraid for us to go rowing, and I love to row, when the lake is still."

It was only a short distance between the coulee and the lake, a flat stretch of land covered with the sweet smelling pussy willows now drooping with their yellow tassels.

Close to the lake shore there were other trees, tall fire-scarred poplars and balm-o-Gilead, a few delicate birches, and wild berry bushes, now white with bloom. The road which they followed was a winter wood road, and it led to where the grassy sod changed to sand, for in winter Jerry hauled his wood from the islands across the thick ice and home over the frozen coulee. But this was not the regular road traveled to town by their neighbors, it turned from the hills to the ice at the point, some distance from the O'Malley homestead.

The boys were taking off their shoes and stockings when the girls set the heavy buckets down on the hard,damp sand and went to the water's edge.

"We are going wading," Eric looked up at Marion apprehensively.

"Tan we?" Edwin asked eagerly.

"If you stop close to shore," Marion turned to John, "you know where it's safe. Don't go out, or you'll come to the drop off."

"Isn't it lovely down here?" Nellie said, looking far off at the dim distant shore.

"It's beautiful," Marion pointed towards the island, "do you hear the geese? They must be feeding on the island, resting maybe, before starting on to their nesting grounds at the Hudson Bay. I wish they'd stop here with all the ducks. I love to hear them honking."

A short distance up the beach the sand ended. The water washed against the steep clay bank forming shallow caves, and the grass roots were exposed and the grass and trees leaned out and overhung the water and reflected there in the clear still pools protected from the soft swell of the lake.

A number of large black boulders were scattered along the sand, they set the pails on the flat top of one of these and seated themselves on an old bleached tree trunk that lay partly in the water to watch the boys splash and play, and to rest and dream in the warm sun.

"I don't see how they can stand that cold water."

Nellie pulled her sweater closer around her, and Marion noticed enviously how the sun made her golden hair shine, remembered how Glory had remarked that Nellie must be Scotch because of her brown eyes and golden hair, and she sighed. Why must she be plain Irish and have plain blue eyes and brown hair?

"I couldn't go in it either," Marion said then, putting her envy behind her, "but they don't mind. Well, I guess the ice is just nicely melted for Jerry harrowed snow banks out of the summerfallow before he could seed."

"We used to have a little girl in the home," Nellie said, "who came from Russia. She said it was lots colder there than it is here; and there was one from California, she used to cry because she couldn't have oranges."

"It must be said, living in a home, and here I am, fretting because I want a better house." Marion sighed. "Mr. White tells us that there is beauty where ever we are if we try to find it."

"I know," Nellie said, "and I must stop thinking about the home. My mother tells me I must. And Marion it wasn't beautiful. There was a dark room where bad children were put. I--I never talk about it to the other girls at school. They don't even know I'm adopted."

"We won't ever tell them," Marion said kindly, "and when I'm here at the lake I forget to be unhappy about any thing. I love the sky because it's blue. And the lake because it reflects the sky and the trees and the birds that fly over it; and the sand that the water washes over when it

blows, and the wind too, I love walking in it when I can't hardly stand up for it. I guess I just like to show it I can. I love the little green leaves that are just coming out enough to show because when they are large enough they will rattle at me when I pass." She laughed and got up from the log. "Let's spread the lunch out there by that boulder, it's nice and warm there, and the sand is dry."

"Oh," Nellie said as they set the food out on the white cloth Marion had spread on the sand. "I meant to tell you I found a prairie chicken's nest and there were ten eggs in it, and some real live baby chickens too. The mother bird made an awful fuss so I went away and left them alone."

"Come now boys" Marion called, "it's time to eat. Roll down your overalls and put on your sweaters or you'll take cold, you'd best put on your shoes and stockings too, we'll wait." Then she spoke to Nellie, "I do love all the lovely things here at the lake but I want the new house too. I am like you, I never speak of it at school, I pretend that the shack is the best house in the whole country, and that I'd slap anyone who said it wasn't. But I do want a pretty house like your's, and my own room and pink window curtains, and Jerry says we will have it this time, because we have such a large field of summerfallow. He says we'll get the best piano in the catalogue,and varnished furniture, and carpets and curtains, and fine china dishes--I can't hardly wait." She looked off across the lake, "just think, he will be hauling that wheat across the lake." Then she drew a long

breath, "the new house and everything."

Little more was said until the lunch was finished, and the boys began to scamper off to play. "They are so happy together," Nellie sighed.

"Don't go far," Marion called after them, "for we are going hunting ladyslippers."

They left the now almost empty buckets on the boulder and followed a narrow path along the lake shore which led into dense underbrush where old charred logs lay in their way, and wild raspberries reached their long thorny stems out to catch their clothing. Wild roses now beginning to bloom pushed across the path too, and had to be removed before they could pass. But they pushed on, determined to find the rare wild orchids before turning back.

They found them where a wild cherry tree was shedding it's white petals, and Marion dropped to her knees in the dead matted grass of anotner year.

The bright yellow flowers stood on sturdy stems above the crumpled weeds and brown withered grass, like waxen mocassins for a fairy's feet.

"Aren't they just devine?" Marion spoke softly as if she were afraid of offending. "Come, let's pick our arms full and hurry, before the boys go in tne bushe and get lost."

"They are almost too precious to pick." Nellie hesitated, "don't you feel that way?"

"No," Marion shook her head emphatically. "I feel like if I miss one it will be lonely and grieve; so I always pick every one I can find so as not to slight even one that's not so pretty."

"Mother says," Nellie began to break the brittle stems also, "that they should be called mocassin flowers instead of ladyslippers. Oh, did you ever--aren't they lovely?"

"There, that's all." Marion stood up tall and straight. "I feel like I had my arms full of gold. But about their name. Mr. White says they call them wild orchids in England. But Glory calls them ladyslippers, and I think she knows."

They struggled back along the hazardous path to where they had left the pails and the boys, and found that the boys were carrying water from the lake to drown gophers out of their holes, busy and happy, sparkling with health. The hot sun shone down through the barren trees for the tiny leaves were only a suggestion of green. Marion looked up at the lacy pattern the many clustered branches made against the sky.

Some ducks settled on the lake with a sharp whirr of wings and quickly swam out, when they saw the boys with pebbles in their hands ready to toss in their direction. A long string of geese sailed over so low the children could see their beady eyes, and hear the soft swish of their wings. They flew in perfect formation, going north, and again Marion sighed, why did they not stop and nest there around the lake with the mallards and teal, and those big black ones that made such a big platter full when Glory baked them?

"Well, we better go to the house," she said at last, "come now, you boys carry the buckets back, we carried them down; and we are loaded down now. I always hate to leave the lake because I'll never see it like this again." She

started towards the corduroy bridge, walking fast.

"What do you mean, you'll never see it again like this?" Nellie walked faster to hear the answer.

"I mean that it changes every day." Marion looked back at the clear expanse of water, at the bare brown island a mile from shore, the distant blue hills beyond and the white clouds reflecting in the still blue water. "The next time we come the leaves will more than likely be out. The grass will all be green, and the Saskatoons and Pin cherries and Choke cherries and bush cranberries won't be blooming--you never can tell we might no come back for long enough."

It was six o'clock when they reached the house. They got cold drinks from the pump and sat down for a bit of a rest on the pump platform.

"I guess I must go home," Nellie sighed. "I've had such a lovely day, why don't you all walk home with me, you have to go for the cows anyway."

"Why not?" Marion felt a surge of excitement, she could maybe play the piano a little while. "Oh, let's do. Come on boys, and we will drive the cows home on our way back. If we hurry we can still get home long before sun down."

For sundown would be three hours away. It did not set until 9 and after that there would be a bright twilight until almost 11, in which to sit outside and read, or to play tag-wood tak, running from one piece of wood in the yard to another or chips around the chopping log.

Marion's heart swelled with happiness as they walked along the lane between the wheat field , the summerfallow,

and the pasture. All nature seemed to be singing in her ears. This year was the year. They would not have to live another winter in the shack, and they would have storm windows and there would be no stuffing of rags around the windows to keep the snow and wind out. And no more snow tracked in either, for there would be an alcove for the storm door where all overshoes and icy shoe-packs would be discarded before coming inside.

The ladyslippers were left in the almost empty water trough, in the shaded end and away from the sun, so Marion now empty handed, picked violets, long stemmed purple ones, and baby faced lang stemmed pansies of white which grew together in the long dry grass. The little boys gathered waxy butter cups that grew in a dry pot hole. And there was an occasional crocus, too, not yet gone to seed and blown away, it's tulip-like flower wrapped in a fuzzy blanket, like an Eskimo baby to protect it from the frost.

When they reached the Bardford home the boys all hung back, even John, for this was not a place where they could come running in and fling their caps in a corner and scamper about and play, like they could at their own home. They at last followed the girls in, when they heard Nellie at the piano, playing one of her lessons and counting under her breath. They came in and sat on the edge of their chairs, hardly daring to breathe. They gazed about at the pictures of water color on the walls, the delicate lace curtains hanging at the clean bright windows, the shining pieces of furniture, the lace doilies and bright thick rug on the floor, unconscious-

ly comparing it with the shack they called their home, wondering how Nellie could live in such a place. Why, it would be like a glass cage to them!

"Now you play something, Marion." Nellie slid over making room on the bench. "I love the way you play."

Marion did not need the second invitation. She sat down and ran her fingers over the keys lovingly, but she said modestly, "I can't really play, not by note--I wish I could!"

Then the boys gathered around the piano. "Play 'Oh Canada;" John prompted. Then after that he wanted "The Wearin' of the Green" and they sang as she played, until she stopped with a gasp. "We can't stop a minute longer. Mercy, it's almost eight o'clock."

Nellie walked with them as far as the fence and stood there talking for a short time, each of them dreading to part.

"Let's make up a word for today so we never will forget the nice time we had at the lake and singing over here, " Marion said, "something that will be a help to us if, well--just suppose if we get into some kind of trouble."

"I have it," John cried. "The word Mr. White is always dinging at us in Sunday School, and that Jerry says we must have to carry on and keep hoping for better things every year--it's courage."

"That's just the word we want," Nellie said clasping her hands, "how could you think it up so suddenly John?"

"Aw, I just--I--well," John stammered, "is it all right Marion?"

"Yes, of course," Marion smiled, "and we must go now Nellie, remember the word is secret. It's our magic word, for ever and ever."

"Goodnight then," Nellie started back to the house, and the twins kept calling out "Good bye," walking backwards as long as they could see her against the bright yellow and crimson sky.

It was past midnight when Glory carried the sleeping Annie in. Jerry was unhitching the team, he would carry the boxes of provisions and clothing that they had purchased in town, inside after he took care of things at the barn.

Marion was sleeping in the big rocker, wrapped in Glory's heavy plaid shawl. She awoke and took Annie off to bed, leaving Glory to fix the lunch.

Jerry came in soon and hung the lantern behind the back door. He came to the warm stove, holding his hands over the comforting heat. "There isn't a chore to do, " he said proudly. "There never was another girl like Marion. She thinks of everything, everybody, but herself."

"That she does," Glory said, "it was done in here too. Coal in the stove too, all I had to do was open the dampers."

"She's a born manager." Jerry took the cup of tea that Glory handed him. "I simply must get her that piano. I feel like I can't go on if we have another failure. Sometimes I can't hardly eat, for worrying about it."

"There now," Glory set a plate of sandwiches before him,"you must not be worrying. Marion knows as the rest of us do, that you do all you can. If we have another failure we

will meet it with the same courage we have always met them. Some way will be provided I'm sure."

"With such a wife as you," Jerry said soberly, "why, there can't be such a thing as giving up. That's where she gets it, from you."

They finished their lunch then in silence and Jerry walked to the door to quiet Buster, who was barking at a coyote pack that made the night miserable with their dismal wailing. He came back slowly.

"That man McNab," he said as he scraped his pipe, tapping it lightly on the hearth of the rang, "to hear him at the meeting you'd think he were a saint. Why, if something doesn't stop him he will be owning every good farm in the township."

"He is the man with the money," Glory said softly, " and people must eat. They know if they charge it, and have no crop to pay up with that McNab will loan it to them."

"Yes, and charge them interest, then compound it," Jerry said bitterly. "If we could only have got along in the first place without that first loan, but then we couldn't; and he has us under his heel now."

"That doesn't worry me as much as the conscription now Jerry." Glory's voice was husky. "I'd give up the place, <u>everything,</u> if I only knew that they wouldn't send you to war--you know, it just freezes me up inside when I let myself think about it."

"And you must not be worrying yourself with that," Jerry said drawing her to him gently. He laid his face against her soft dark hair, "if they take me, they will be needing me; and like you say, some way even then will be provided."

"Who wants to stop home from Sunday School and help me start digging the cellar for the new house?" Jerry looked from one clean shining face to another. It was Sunday morning and all the O'Malleys were at the breakfast table. "I think Mr. White would excuse you this once."

"I do." John looked up soberly from his well creamed and sugared porridge. "And I think Marion will."

"You mean--?" Marion's face was pâle, her bule eyes dark with excitement, "you relly mean--?"

"Yes I really mean." Jerry laughed. "There will not be a thing to stop the summerfallow, unless-well, why not get busy and have faith in it? We start today; it will take long enough, the way we will be doing it, scooping it out with shovels, only one wheelbarrow."

But when Jerry left the room with John and the little boys at his heels he turned to Marion, "You help mama, we men will be doing the digging."

"I will daddy," Marion started stacking the dishes nervously, "But when we finish in here I'll be helping too, out there."

"Isn't it just too good to be true mama?" she asked Glory as the work progressed, the dishes, the beds, cleaning and scalding the cream separator, and putting all the parts on the table outside in the sun, so many things, Marion thought, when you wanted to be doing something else.

"Don't set your heart on it," Glory warned. "We may never get beyond the cellar." She poured warm water in the tub for the baby's bath, "so many things could happen. I hate to see you disappointed."

"Yes, I know," Marion said sadly, "so many things." She went to the front door watching Jerry throw sod into a pile, while John and the twins lifted it in their hands, placing each piece into the wheelbarrow. "Wouldn't it just be too wonderful to be sure something grand was going to happen,that nothing could stop it?"

"That only happens in story boosk," Glory smiled. She laid the baby on a thick towel that she had spread on the table. She had set the tub on a chair close by and held Annie's head on her hand above it. She dipped the wash cloth into the water running it over the sudzy curls, being careful that none of it ran into her eyes, and after washing all the soap out she wrapped the child in the towel and sat down by the hot oven to dry and dress her. "We plan things. We really intended to build our second summer but the sod crop froze. Then we planned again and again. Sometimes it was sickness and doctor bills that stopped us. Something always came up, and we tried to meet it cheerfully always hoping for better times--"

"I know," Marion dusted talcum on Annie's dimpled toes, "well, I am still young, if something happens this year--but I've already told Nellie all about how I was going to have pink window curtains and a piano--"

"There now," Glory said kindly, "don't you feel bad already, You go on with your planning. I can see it makes you real happy."

The morning went on wings. Marion took an old bucket out and carried dirt in it for a while, then went back inside to help Glory with the dinner. She was walking on air.

"It will be steak and mashed potatoes," Glory said shen whe at last came in to set the table, "and some of the relish from the cellar. You fetch it Marion and while you're down there get the butter and a jar of the strawberries. We will make it a gala meal. I made Daddie's favorite marble cake."

"Steak," Marion saw it then in the pan on the hot stove. "I didn't know you got steak."

"Yes, and a nice large roast." Glory opened the trap door in the center of the room, "now run along down and get the things, I'm sure I don't know what the poor butcher will be doing if this crop fails."

The twins fell asleep at the table after eating heaping plates of the good wholesome food. Marion took their dusty shoes and stockings off and carried them to the lounge, laying them side by side.

"I don't know how they get so dirty," she scolded, "look at those feet and Johnnie gave them both a good bath last night. Well, we will get along faster this afternoon with them out from under foot."

The sun became so hot during the afternoon Jerry paused occasionally taking his cap off to dry the perspiration from his forehead, taking time to glance longingly out over the summerfallow trying to see a sheen of green.

"It's a bit too early" he remarked to Marion, "come the 24th and a good rain, it will be up."

"Rain?" Marion scanned the horizon for clouds, "you don't mean it will rain on the 24th and spoil our picnic?"

"I say it will and I say it won't," Jerry answered, "and I don't know which I mean. I want it to rain for the sake of the wheat, and I don't for the picnic's sake.. So, there you are. But look who's coming, McNab himself. Listen to that car of his roar over that rutted trail; he will be telling me again that I shouldbe grading it."

Marion and John huddled together watching the car sway and skid, then suddenly Marion dropped her bucket and started towards the stable. "Come on," she cried, "we'll hunt the eggs."

In the safe darkness of the passageway she turned, clutching John by the arm. "Whatever would old Potato nose be wanting with Jerry today?" She muttered, her eyes snapped, "why--look, Jerry's all upset."

"If you'll just--" John motioned for silence, "we can hear everything and it ain't eavesdropping--and I don't care if I did say 'ain't'. Listen!"

"Why are you digging a hole in your front yard, O'Malley?" the banker asked.

"What would you be thinking?" Jerry answered bitterly.

"I wouldn't be in a hurry," McNab said, "I wouldn't depend too much on that summerfallow. You're in pretty deep, O'Malley, that's why I leased that Hudson Bay land. You may not need th' hay meadow next year. Now, keep an eye on tho e breeds over there, I want that fence in right away. Keep them workin'. They are to cut an' stack the hay too." He got out of the car, the crank in his hand, but on second though he handed it to Jerry, "here you are. Give 'er a twirl for me will ya?"

Jerry swung the crank angrily and the engine began to clatter. The banker leaned out to shout before driving off, "I'm expecting you to watch my aberdeen-angus herd too when I turn them in that pasture."

The children watched until the car went around the point and out of sight, then Marion began hunting eggs in the clean hay-filled mangers.

"Now he's got our hay meadow," Marion said angrily, "He must be thinking of putting us out this fall. He better not be so sure--but I have all I can carry in my apron, come on in. I'm going to tell Glory that we know all about the mortgage and everything."

Going into the dim room Marion tried not to see Glory and Jerry standing so still and hopeless in the front door. She placed the eggs in a large tin pan in the pantry and coming out she said as much to the room as to Glory.

"We got part of the eggs, Mama," she paused until Glory turned, then went on breathlessly, "we want you to know, John and I do, that we know about the mortgage, and heard what potato nose---"

"Potato nose?" Glory gasped, "why Marion, what, who?----"

"I guess we shouldn't," Marion hung her head, "but that's what we call him, I mean the banker, Mr. McNab."

"But it isn't respectful." Glory spoke so calmly Marion felt terrible.

"I'm realysorry," she said humbly, "I--I won't ever let him hear me call him that. But I wanted you to know that we knew, and that we are going to do everything we can to hel." She had to pause then because a lump in her

throat choked her. She ran outside and later John found her carrying dirt in the old bucket, her face serene.

"Jerry is coming," John volunteered, "he said that we would go right on and finish digging the cellar, even if we never did build the new house, then if something happens and we can build, why the cellar will be ready, 'at makes me glad."

"I'm glad too," Marion straightened her tired back, "Oh, I'm that happy, and Johnny, maybe something will happen."

"I guess if you think so, it will," John said, "most every'thing you think comes true. What makes you like that?"

" I don't know, I just am." Marion said solemnly, "I guess it's because I'm a woman."

"Well if you know so much, is it going to rain on the 24th, and spoil the picnic?"

"To tell you the truth, Johnnie, I think it will." Marion began lifting sods again grimly, then she spoke more brightly, "but if it doesn't we'll go and all the country will be there, right here at our own lake. And I will wear the lovely dress Glory got me yesterday at town, and the hat. Johnnie isn't it beautiful with the red rose and black velvet ribbon on it? And you are to wear the new suit. And the twins, won't they look sweet? And little Annie in the pink outfit. And white booties. It's wonderful Johnnie that they can buy things on time. If they couldn't, why, we never would have anything to wear."

"That depends on whether we have any wheat," John said sagely, "if we didn't buy them, we wouldn't be owing for them."

"They will be paid for," Marion said, "shhhh here comes Jerry."

The cellar was almost finished on the 24th, and when the O'Malley children awoke they ran to the door, to turn back sadly, for the sun was blotted out by dark scudding clouds and before breakfast was over, rain was pounding on the roof, splashing against the windows, running in small rivers across the yard.

"I guess I'll put the new things all away," Marion said sadly, "I had my heart set on the picnic, I don't see why it had to go and rain. I never will get over it." She lifted her new hat proudly, "but I can wear it to Sunday School, and the beautiful white organdie dress, Mama. I never will be able to thank you for my new outfit. Just think, patent leather slippers. I'll be ressed as well as Nellie,now. But the whole country would see it at the picnic, it won't be the same wearing it places now."

"And the whole country will be sitting back now too, daughter," Jerry said laying his paper down, "with happiness in their hearts, for in three days the wheat will all be coming up. We're going to make it this year, nothing can stop us. Just keep that in mind, daughter, and don't fret about the picnic."

"I guess I shouldn't," Marion admitted bravely, "but I was counting on it so much," she walked over to the window, "I can't even see the lake through the rain."

"No, and if you could, it would be nothing but white caps." Jerry finished filling his pipe and began searching through his pockets for a match, "fetch me a match will you, daughter, and look through the new catalogue--pick out the nice things we will be buying when the new house is finished. I have already decided on the dynamo I will be getting. I'll install it in the cellar, and I'll run wires to th' horse stable, the cow barn. Yes, even the pig pen and hen coop."

"Oh, daddy, not electric lights?" Marion cried, "not really?"

"That we will have electric lights, daughter, there will be no more smoked lantern and lamp gloves to polish, and no more pumping of the gas lamp. " Jerry spread the week old newspaper out again settling back in the big rocking chair comfortable, a fog of smoke about him, "now settle down as I said with the catalogue. We will be needing something from near every page."

One warm afternoon after the haying was done and the wheat which had spread a green blanket over the summerfallow just as Jerry said, three days after the rain of the 24th, and had grown in leaps and bounds and was now headed and waving gracefully in the breeze, Marion walked over to spend the afternoon with Nellie. She went along the lane between the pasture and the field slowly. Life was so beautiful. Here was the wheat almost ready to ripen, dipping and rippling, and the sound of it was music in her ears. It meant the new house and having nice things like the more fortunate Bradfords. Electric lights, a telephone too maybe, she

she dreamed as she loitered along, with the hum of insects and an occasional chirrup from the meadow lark that hid his nest so completely from her in the spring, blotting out all other sound.

She did not notice the cloud that was swiftly spreading out across the western horizon, the black cloud with green shadings and white fingers reaching out to point the way. She was at the Bradford's back door when the first shattering bolt of thunder roared through the air. She turned in amazement to stare wide eyed; and lightning streaked across the sky leaving patterns like huge trees, again the thunder crashed.

Mrs. Bradford and Nellie came running to her, looking up, too, at the black wall, with the rolling wind clouds racing ahead.

"Come in quickly child," Mrs. Bardford cried, "did you not see the storm coming?"

Marion shook her head, dumb with shock and apprehension. "I was thinking," she stammered, "and watching for lilies along the way, everything was so perfect, now our wheat will be ruined, I know it will, for I heard Jerry tell Glory that a high wind would put it all on the ground, it was so tall and top heavy." Tears began to slip down her face and she hid them with her hands.

"Storms are very freakish dear," Mrs. Bradford said soothingly, "this one may miss your farm altogether."

Marion took her hands down from her face, shaking her head. "I have a feeling that it's gone, all the summerfallow, and our new house, and I must run back home

before it starts to comfort Glory and the little boys. I won't mind it so much if they can stand it. I been thinking anyhow that if they take Jerry in the army like I guess they will, I--I'd lots rather keep him home even if we do have to stop in the shack."

"That is a very brave decision, Marion, " Mrs. Bradford said, "and you are a brave girl too; but I can't permit you to start back home in the face of a storm like this. Why, that thunder shakes the house. Nellie and I have the windows all closed tight, we have been watching the cloud."

"But Glory will think maybe I'm out in it."

"There now," Mrs. Bradford took Marion by the hand and led her into the living room," you sit down and wait until it passes, then you may go back home and, my dear, I hope it isn't as bad as you think."

"It is though," Marion spoke calmly now, "I knew I was counting on it too much, I guess when we want things like I wanted the new house it--it's maybe wicked and should be taken away--Mr. White said something about putting too much store in earthly things--maybe the storm was sent to make me appreciate things more."

"There now, child," Mrs. Bradford touched her eyes with her lace trimmed handkerchief, "it's a noble way to put it, but I can't hink that the dear Lord would be punishing you for anything. No, I couldn't."

Although the cloud roared like a hail cloud, and rain sluiced against the windows, there was no hail bouncing in the yard, but even this did not comfort Marion, "the

wind and this awful rain will put it all down," she insisted calmly, "and it may be hailing at our house. You know hail goes in streaks."

As soon as the storm passed she started back home. And just as she said, hail had struck the O'Malley fields and had left all the wheat beaten into the ground. When she came around the hay stacks where she could see the house her breath caught, for Jerry was nailing long boards over the windows. The twins seeing her coming, ran to meet her.

"It hailed the windows all out," Eric cried.

"It wained wight in my house," Edwin chimed in, and taking each of them by the hand, Marion walked slowly to where Jerry stood.

"Well, daughter, " he said, watching her face anxiously, "We give the new house up again. There's a good girl, run in and comfort your mother."

"It's all right, daddy," Marion tried to make her voice sound convincing. "I don't mind too much."

She went inside then, and without a word she took the lamp from the pantry shelf and lit it. Glory sat in the big chair, her hands over her face, but she turned and spoke to Marion, "thanks honey, I guess I've been crying. We were so very close to the new house this time. I didn't think about the lamp. I knew the gas lamp had to be pumped and I hadn't the strength to do it. All I could see or hear was darkness."

"It really will be dark now with the boards over the windows," Marion observed, "but you know it could of been

worse."

"I was worried about you too," Glory said, "I thought you might be out in it, and the baby screamed with fright when the windows began to break fand fall out and hail began to fly inside and clatter on the floor, Why, daddy picked up almost a tub full when he cleaned out the glass."

"Yes, I saw it outside," Marion said, "let's make some ice cream?"

"First,dear, see if your bed is dry, and I'll lay Annie down, then we will see if the thunder soured the cream. Sour cream wouldn't make good ice cream."

The cumbersome wooden freezer was taken outside and the children began picking up more hail stones to freeze the cream, but first the cows must be milked and the separating done, as all the cream was sour as Glory had feared. The clouds were all blown away, and the sun was setting in a pool of crimson and yellow. And all around the yard lay young chickens which were drowned during the storm.

And the ice cream helped them to forget their loss for a time. A trip to town was necessary now for glass to replace the panes broken by the hail. The subject of their loss was avoided at all times until one day they were visited again by the banker, McNab.

"You may just as well pull out this fall," he said to Jerry, and Marion was aghast that he dared mention it before them all, "that storm finished you, O'Malley. I have a shack in town you can have for ten a month. You

can get on as a section hand, it will pay enough to feed the family and the children can--"

"I'll hear no more of that," Jerry said, "my mortgage does not come due until next March. I'm not leaving until then and I bid you good-day."

"Now don't get excited," the banker glanced about nervously, "I wanted to winter the angus herd here around the buildings you see and--"

"I will have nothing of the kind," Jerry said shortly, "we still have the cows and chickens, and hogs to butcher. We're well prepared for winter, with the flour, potatoes and vegetables I took in as pay for helping the neighbors with the harvest. There's nothing to collect, Mr. McNab until March."

"But don't forget, I have a lien on the stock too, by March they may all be starved."

"What do you mean '<u>starved</u>'?" Jerry was pacing the floor. "I thought you might be suggesting this when you put those angus here on the Hudson Bay land that I have always used for the hay, but I out-smarted you, I raised green feed, it's stacked out there plenty to do us until March and some to sell then, I also found a bit of hay outside your woven wire fence. Now, may I bid you goodday?"

The banker went out without saying more but he leaned from his car before driving off to say to Jerry who followed him out.

"I'll be out again," he said, "you are a stubborn man, O'Malley, but sometimes the stubborn ones bend to my will."

Marion saw him coming the next time and she hurried the children off to the lake. They wore thick sweaters beneath their coats because the wind was sharp. Soon snow would be flying through the air again; how Marion hated to see it come, how she hated to see all the birds follow the ducks and geese when they gathered together and spread their wings and soared off to the south.

"We will pick pretty grass for winter bouquets," she said, "and cat tails if the wind hasn't ravelled them all out; and see if there's any ducks left on the lake. You know, Johnnie, Mr. Moore told us that some kinds of ducks wouldn't leave until frost and often were found with their feet frozen in the ice."

They were hurrying along the well beaten road which had been the one used to haul the hay that Jerry cut along the coulee and what he could find by the lake. But the dry slough grass on the coulee stood tall and waving in the wind. This he could not cut because of the blue mud underneath.

Marion carried Annie across the corduroy bridge while John held the twins tight by the hands. And they had hardly reached the lake when Marion pointed to the point where a thin film of smoke arose to the sky. The wind whipped it away, then another arose.

"Johnnie," she had stopped and set Annie on her own wabbling feet. "He has set a fire like I said he would, with his cigar stub. Potato nose has started a prairie fire. See how it is spreading. Here, you carry Annie. I'll take the twins. We gotta run and beat it across the coulee or--"

She sobbed brokenly, "can you run with her?"

Without answering John caught Annie up and started back over the low sloping hill to the coulee. Marion gave the lake one fleeting glance. All this will be black tomorrow, she thought as she lifted the little boys beneath her arms and started after John as fast as she could go. But she was still thinking,-all these beautiful painted leaves, these yellow trees that lean over to see themselves in the lake, will be black.

In spite of the fire now roaring close to the coulee grass, John waited for her at the bridge. "Take her on," Marion screamed, "don't wait. We will get there as soon as we possibly can." They were both on the bridge, running. "Tell Jerry to come."

John left them behind then and Marion was barely across the bridge when the fire roared up the coulee spreading choking smoke over them.

Almost suffocated by the smoke and fright Marion had to stop and let the boys down. Catching her hands they began pulling her forward.

"We tan wun faster an 'u tan," Edwin boasted, "tum on hurry!"

But Marion could not hurry any faster, her side was paining, her lungs were aching from the smoke.

"I can't run any more," she gasped, "you go on home. Run. Do as I say," she screamed sinking to the ground in a helpless huddle.

"We won't leave you here," Eric said stubbornly. He sat down beside her and crossed his legs. They were all

coughing and the fire roared not far away.

Then just as Marion forced herself to her feet again she heard Jerry calling. "Marion, Marion where are you?"

"Here we are, Daddy," she answered, "come a little farther. I can't run any more."

Then here he came running in the smoke. Someone was behind him. Could it be--yes, it was the banker. He snatched the twins up and ran on ahead. Jerry ran with Marion, limp, over his shoulder. He ran like a deer ahead of a hunter. But when they reached the wide strip of plowed fire-break he let her down picking up a wet sack where he had dropped it. The banker had waited there and Jerry told him--"Take them on in McNab. I'll set out a back-fire. Maybe save the feed. Get those barrels filled and send Glory and Marion in the house, their dresses will catch fire."

His voice was dashed away by the wind which arose higher and higher as the fire grew stronger.

They found Glory pumping water into a large pail which she handed to John in the wagon. He emptied it into one of two barrels that Jerry had loaded before he went after Marion.

"I'll take that pail, Mr. O'Malley," the banker said. He took it from the pump handing it to John. "You and the little girl best go inside. Sparks might set you on fire. John and I will get these barrels of water to O'Malley if those horses will stand a bit longer--whoah there!"

"You go on in, Mama," Marion pleaded, "I hear the baby crying. I will hold the horses for them until they go."

"I'd like to know who set this fire, "McNab looked searchingly at Marion. Glory had gone in and Marion scowled at him in a fury.

"You set it yourself, Mr. Smart Man," she shouted, "just like you set our yard on fire that time, throwing your cigar stub away, like you do, without putting it out."

"You don't say," the banker rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Maybe I did at that. What do you know? Burned my own hay down and mired my onw cattle in the lake--but you have a nerve young lady, facing me with my own undoing."

"It's true," Marion's lips trembled, "that's why I could say it."

McNab began pumping again and when the barrels were full he and John drove the wagon close to the green feed stacks, dipped sacks into the barrels and ran to where Jerry was beating flaming grass frantically. John was sent back to watch around the barnyard and report if sparks caught the buildings afire.

But after all the grass close to the plowed guard had burned, the fire swept past leaving the feed stacks still standing and the buildings safe. "It was the fire guard that saved us," Jerry told Glory when she carried a bucket of hot, black tea out to them. "We are going to Bradfords in McNab's car. He hadn't a guard on the place. I've been telling him but he didn't see the need."

McNab had the car ready and John was in the back seat. Jerry leaped in and they were off, driving into the smoke.

Glory and Marion began getting dinner. "They will be bringing all the Bradfords back I think," Glory said. "This nice tender young prairie chicken, fried so nice and brown, will really taste good to them."

Marion brought butter and pickles and fruit from the cellar and helped Glory to wash the black from the twins' faces before putting on clean clothing. Annie must be cleaned up too. It seemed a very short time until the car was chugging in the yard again and they all ran out in the cold strong wind, shivering and bracing themselves.

Mr. and Mrs. Bradford were there and Nellie, pale and silent. They were rushed inside to the fire, but the banker drove away refusing the invitation to dinner.

Marion rushed Nellie off to the bedroom to change into a clean dry dress. "You are drenched," she said. "However did you get that way?"

"It's what saved our lives." Nellie's teeth were chattering. "If my father hadn't seen it coming and ran for the horse blankets and took my mother and me out to lie down against the water trough and covered us with the wet blankets why--we--we--" her lip began to tremble.

"There now," Marion comforted her, "don't you think about it. Come, we have fried prairie chicken and Mama made buns."

"We were still at the breakfast table, "Mrs. Bradford was saying, after the meal was underway, "we had got a bundle of mail, the week's supply of newspapers, and were going through it when we looked out to find that the fire was all around us. The hay was on fire but Mr. Bradford

did get to the barn and drive the stock out on the plowed field,and get the blankets to cover us with. It isn't easy to see everything one has go up in flames."

"Their wheat stacks are still burning, "Jerry said soberly. "No chance of putting that fire out. We will put you up until you have made some arrangements, Bradford."

"That will be swell," Mr. Bradford smiled across the table at Nellie. "That little girl of mine would rather be here than at home any day, aye sugar? And the biggest worry she has is that she wanted to give some of her dolls to your baby at Christmas.

"We will buy her a new one," Mrs. Bradford said, "if you can get to town and wire your dad, Bob, we will soon be set up again."

"I will drive you to town," Jerry suggested, "if you want to go this afternoon. I need to get a few things too."

"We will pay you well for this," Mrs. Bradford told Glory when they were washing the dishes.

"Jerry won't let you pay, "Glory smiled, "when he has friends, they are friends, you know."

"Oh, but we can't impose."

"We will let the men decide that. Perhaps you can help me finish a comfort I've been trying to get finished before the cold sets in."

The next Monday instead of Mr. Bradford coming by to take the O'Malley children to school in the car, they had to ride in the O'Malley democrat, all wrapped in blankets

and the one fur robe they owned, but even so, they shivered with cold before they reached the small frame school that stood on a hill and shook with every wind. For the Bradford car had burned also and now they had no means of transportation, only the democrat and so far there had been no snow.

Day after day they followed this plan. Up while it was still dark; off to school before the sun was up and waiting for Jerry to pick them up after school was out.

The Bradfords were only with them a short time as the neighborhood came and helped when the money came to buy the lumber. Soon another house stood on the old foundation. A bar was up also and a new car stood in a shed. But there was a new cutter too and harness for the fast footed team for after snow fell the car would be parked until spring.

September passed into October and November came along. Still there was no snow. The plowed fields were blowing away. Farmers met in the stores and talked about it and the war. The married men of a certain age were to be conscripted soon--Jerry and Mr. Bradford would be in this class.

Marion and John often talked about it. "I don't know why we wanted a new house so much," Marion said one day. "When we are going to lose Jerry even. I think the shack would be grand if we could keep him too."

John said nothing in answer but he drew his arm across his eyes and turned away.

The cold continued to strengthen but still there was no snow. After the Bradfords were settled the new car was put into use taking the children to school and it was a great improvement on the old democrat with the spokes rattling in the wheels and the wind cutting through their wraps to chill them to the bone.

Marion and Nellie sitting together in the back seat would often speak about the sun.

"Do you realize, "Marion said one morning when it was exceptionally dark, "we never see the sun at home only on Saturdays and Sundays. It comes up after we start to school and sets before we get home. Jerry says we didn't miss the land of the midnight sun very much."

"I like it when it snows," Nellie said, "then you can see folks coming and going."

"Yes, so do I," Marion answered. "I like to see sleighs coming across the lake at night, if it would only snow."

But Marion often sat through her study period thinking, not turning a page. Mr. Moore,her teacher, saw it and wondered about it, for Marion had been his most studious pupil. Marion's worry was Jerry. If Jerry was conscripted and Potato nose took the farm what would become of Glory and the rest of them? What would they do? Oh God, she would pray in her mind, please, please take care of us and let us keep Jerry.

"I heard my mother and father talking about the conscription," Nellie confided to Marion one evening going home from school in the warm car. "If he goes we will have

to move to town."

Marion stared out at the dust which fogged from the fields and all the world seemed dark to her. "I don't know waht we will do but whatever it is," she drew a deep breath, "I am going to try to bear it as Glory says, like a lady." Theys were in silence for a short time, then Marion spoke again, "since the fire Potato nose seems changed. John says it's because I talked up to him but I think it is because all his cattle ran into the lake and were saved from the fire. But he came out one day and told Jerry to go ahead and butcher all the hogs we need for winter and a beef too. Of course he's sure of getting the rest now. He can afford to be generous so when we get another farm maybe he can get another mortgage."

"I don't like that man," Nellie cried, "but Mother says I should not be this way because it could have been us, too, asking him for a loan and giving our farm for security if my grandfather back east hadn't sent us a lot of money."

"I was <u>that</u> glad for you," Marion smiled faintly, " "glad that you did get a new house right away and another piano. I couldn't hardly stand you losing your piano," she sighed wearily, "I guess I won't be getting mine now until I get my education and a job in town. They don't know at home that I feel this way so please don't--"

"I wouldn't for the world Marion," Nellie promised. "I know how you feel. You feel just like I did when little Alice died."

They bodh shed a few silent tears then and their eye lashes coated over with thick white frost.

A few nights after this after all the O'Malleys were in bed and asleep, a car stopped in the yard and someone began pounding on the door.

"Get up and let us in!" It was Bradford's voice. "Hey, Jerry, the war's over. Let us in!"

The news had come over the telephone. They had heard every phone on the rural line ringing. Everybody was up and talking about it--the war was over. Neither Jerry nor Mr. Bradford would have to go now.

Marion, with tears flooding down her cheeks, took Nellie off to bed with her but Glory made tea and set out a midnight lunch and the four of them sat around the table and talked until day came creeping feebly through the windows.

Marion and Nellie talked a little before going to sleep, snuggled down deep under the warm woolen blankets.

"I don't mind giving up the shack now," Marion said happily. "I feel like my prayers are answered. I've been praying--oh, for such a long time for Jerry not to go, so he is spared. Now Potato nose can have the farm and shack--with Jerry here, like Glory is always saying, some way will be provided. I can really plunge into the school concert now and get my mind on it."

"Yes," Nellie said, "and so can I. And I think it's wonderful of Mr. Moore havin g it. Even though the Ruthenians can't learn the songs there's enough of us to sing them without them."

There were long hours at school now for the songs and drills must be practiced without slighting the regular subjects too much. Jerry sometimes drove the Bradford car after the children and would sit inside by the red hot stove and wait until they were dismissed,then would chat with the teacher while the children put their wraps on.

"I've been reading about an epidemic of influenza," he said one day. "I wonder if it might be dangerous to have the the concert if someone might bring it in and infect the lot of us?"

"I hardly think so," Mr. Moore shook his head thoughtfully. "In these remote places there is little chance of contagion. They seem to think that the tropps shipped across here going to Siberia may have spread it. Well, Mr. O'Malley, if you of the school board think it best to drop the concert, let me know and we will do it."

"Tell you what, Mr. Moore," Jerry started out now for the children were all ready and the boys were running on out--they would be half-frozen playing tag if he didn't go at once, "you see, I have no telephone, suppose you call the other members and put it up to them. I will agree on what they decided"

"Very well, O'Malley, I will do that tonight."

But the other members of the board wanted the concert. "There is so little to go to," they argued, "and they say the flu is like measles--not a contagion but an epidemic, and if it's coming all the King's horses can't stop it.We are having a dance after the concert. Can't cancel that."

"Mr. Moore is depending on John, Nellie and me to carry the songs through," Marion was chatting with Glory as they got ready for the concert. The Bradfords were coming by for them in the car. "Those hunkies just stand and look around and laugh. I asked one of the girls what was so funny one day and she said that they were very happy to be living here in Alberta where everything is free and they can go to school; that it isn't that way in the old country."

"I do feel worried about the influenza," Glory included Jerry in their conversation. "With this dust flying, why, those germs will be everywhere."

"Well, I put it up to the teacher. The others of the board wanted to take chances. And I've been thinking, Glory, stopping home won't safeggard us. But come, everybody into your wraps, here comes the car."

On the way to the school house Glory would press her hand to her forehead without thinking. Her head had been splitting all afternoon but she couldn't say anything about it and spoil the evening for the others. A good rest would be all she needed. She would sleep-in the next morning if it wasn't better.

The house was well packed. People from the four corners of the earth. All of them neighbors now with the common interest--to see their children educated and on farms of their own.

The concert was started as usual by the audience standing and singing the national anthem--God save our gracious King,

Long live our noble king,

God save our king!

Send him victorious

Happy and glorious,

Long to reign over us.

God save our king.'

Marching across the improvised stage the children wound in and out, performing different well practiced drills, singing patriotic anthems.

Nellis was supposed to lead in "O Canada" but to her horror, Marion saw that she was pale, sick; she drew her close to lean on her and sang out loud and clear to keep anyone from missing Nellie's voice. And all the time she was singing the song through, she was wondering, has she got it? Her heart stood still at the thought for she had read some articles about the influenza, too, and how they were dying like flies across the line.

Mr. Moore noticed that Nellie was ill and while the other groups were singing he suggested that Marion sit back behind the curtain with her. "We will m anage the other songs without you two," he said with an anxious glance at Nellie's pale face. "They all know 'The Maple Leaf' pretty well, and ah--I will ask John to find your mother, Nellie."

Marion never did know how the concert continued. She set with Nellie's head in her lap waiting for Mrs. Bradford to come, and listened to the other pupils sing 'The Ma le Leaf' without the best voices in the school, her own and Nellie's. In spirit she was singing with them.

'In days of yore from Britain's shore,
Wolf the dauntless here came,
And planted firm Britannia's flag
On Canada's fair domain.'"

That was all she heard of the song for Mrs. Bradford came in behind the curtain and to the seat where she sat with Nellie's head in her lap, and the stricken look on her face froze the blood in Marion's veins.

She knew then that Nellie had influenza, even before the doctor, whom John had brought from the audience, came back of the curtain, too, and stood shaking his head and frowning down at the suffering girl.

"We must get her to the hospital at once," he said, watching Mrs. Bradford's anxious face searchingly.

"Do you mean in Edmonton?" she asked huskily.

"No, indeed, we have a well-equipped hospital in town now, in the Union church. We sent to Edmonton for cots--everything we needed and Mr. White has taken over. He is a great help to me."

"You mean you have cases right here at home and I didn't know. I wouldn't have--"

"Now, please," the doctor took one of Nellie's limp hands in his own, "our patients came in today. We had the hospital equipment sent down on the local. In fact I came out here tonight to give the people warning and to admonish them to come in to the hospital at the very first sympton. We have a much better chance if we get them in the beginning."

"But are you sure about--?" Mrs. Bradford laid her hand on Nellie's hot brow.

"There is no doubt about it. I would advise you to come along. We are very scarce of nurses, the returned service men are doing the most of it. We have cars driving now, calling at out-of-the-way places to see if they are ill. One old Ruthenian refused to let his wife go--said she had to stop home and cook h s meals. She had a temperature of 104 degrees. But the boys brought her in. Get her ready, will you? I will make my little talk. I see the concert is over. I suppose your husband will want to drive you in?"

"Yes, certainly, we will be ready to go--ah, Marion will you find Nellie's father, please?"

Another neighbor took the O'Malley's home and Glory's head was numb with pain. She said nothing about it until the next day. Mr. Bradford came by on his way home from town and they were all discussing the epidemic that had pounced upon the community over night. When the men went out at last she dropped on the lounge, her hands pressed over her mouth to keep from moaning.

Marion stood in horror looking down on Glory. She knew what was wrong. Glory had it too. She ran to the barn for Jerry.

"Come quick, Daddy," she caught his arm, her voice raised in terror. "Mama has it."

Mr. Bradford followed Jerry in and stood back, his cap in his hand. "Perhaps we should take her to town at once?" he suggested.

"We'll be taking care of her in her own home as we should," Jerry said shortly, "but I do appreciate your offer, Bradford, and if you will call the hospital in town and have them send me some medicine, it will be fine."

"I'll do that gladly," Mr. Bradford hurried out, calling back, "Let me know if I can do anything more. Send word by someone going by."

Marion and John huddled together by the window, thawing off the thick white frost to peep through and see Mr. Bradford leave. But when they left the window, ice was soon thick again over their peep holes, then the frost covered the ice until there was nothing there but the palm leaves and ferns that always formed on the window frost.

"Our magic word didn't do much good," John muttered. They had gone back to the stove to warm their fingers. "Now she's sick."

"But we mustn't forget it," Marion began to wash dishes, "we must keep thinking about it for we can't go on without <u>courage</u>."

"I'll wipe the dishes for you," John said. And for the first time Marion did not correct his English.

It was quite late when the car from town bringing the medicine out, came by and the men had no time to come in. "There's a family over beyond the lake we must fetch in," one of them told Jerry, "neighbors reported no smoke there today."

After this, Marion and Jerry moved Glory's bed in and pushed it back in the corner close to the book case. It crowded the room but it would be warm there near by the heater. Marion slept very little that night and the next morning Jerry staggered in from the choring and refused to eat his breakfast.

Marion with trembling hands helped him out of his sheep skin and to a chair at the table, "can't you eat a little porridge?" she coaxed. "Maybe you'd feel better; or some toast, it's buttered on both sides the way you like it. Here, try your tea, I boiled it so's it'ud be strong."

"I'll tell you daughter," Jerry staggered from the table, "I will lie down here behind mother, just--I need a bit of extra sleep. Don't worry, just watch for Bradford when he goes into town. Have him send cars out. We'd better all go in--Mr. White will know someone who will look after you children."

"We'll stop him, Daddy," Marion stammered. She was so frightened and she must not let John know. "Here, I'll help you with your shoepaks."

None of the children were hungry. All the porridge was left with the frozen cream and milk melting and mingling over it. Marion melted a place on the window by rubbing the

thick white frost with her fingers and set John to watch for Mr. Bradford. But ice continued to form and he took a knife from the table to scratch it off so he could see through.

The little ones seemed sleepy so Marion set them all in the big rocking chair close to the stove where they would be warm, and hurried to do the morning work--a prayer in her heart.

"Dear God," she mumbled under her breath, "you let us have Jerry, now please let us have him and Glory both. It's all right Potato nose taking the place from us, <u>just let us live through--please, Oh--please!"</u>

But Mr. Bradford did not go by. At noon John went out to feed the horses that were tied in the stable and after a long time Marion realized that he should have come back and hadn't. She left the little ones alone, both Glory and Jerry were in a deep stupor like sleep. She could not rouse them even for their medicine.

"Eric," she said severely,"you and Edwin must watch Annie. Keep her in the big chair. I will only be gone a minute."

"Eric will," then she saw that his face was pinched, pale, and that there were round red spots on his white cheeks, "but Edwin's <u>sick</u>."

"Oh, Mercy, you both are, but I must go!" Marion was frantic. "I must get Johnnie or he will freeze. Here you both sit by her again in the big chair until Marion gets Johnnie, and--" Suddenly she realized that she must get word to someone. If Mr. Bradford was going to town on

the lake road, missing them, she must stop someone else.

The idea came to her at once. She took a clean sheet from the chest in the cold bedroom. With the scissors she cut a hole near the middle. She put her wraps on and ran to the stable as fast as she could go. The air was so cold it brought tears to her eyes and made her cough. John was huddled down by the oats box, the measuring pan in his hand. He looked up with swimming eyes, "I can't feed 'em!" he gasped, "I guess I got it too."

"Oh, Johnnie, this is so terrible," Marion was not crying now, "look, keep thinking about our magic word, see? Remember it? Courage. I'm putting a flag on top of the highest green feed stack." She shook the sheet out and forced the handle of a pitch fork through the hole which she had cut; taking some twine from the pocket of her sweater she tied it securely to the handle, wrapping it far down so it would resist the wind.

"You might fall," John muttered. "You might--"

"'Course I won't. I will hold fast to the ladder while I'm sticking the fork in the bundle. Sit sill now. I'll feed them when I get back."

But when Marion came back into the warm stable John was staggering from the oats box to feed boxes trying to stop the horses whinnying. But she saw that he spilled as much oats as he put in the feed boxes.

"Sit down again," she said gently, "Here, let me help you to that sack of bran. There now, I'll feed old Bonnar, then we're through."

But after helping John into the house and putting him to bed on the lounge, and going to the big chair, she found both the little boys shivering with cold, their faces crimsonl

She put them to bed with John,on the wide comfortable lounge and wrapping a thick blanket around Annie she set her back inthe chair, a sob in her throat.

"Now, there you are." She tried to smile but the child was not deceived. She began to whimper and cling to Marion. She took her arms away from around her neck, desperately trying to keep calm.

"Now you must rock Annie for me," she said at last. "Marion must bring the wood in and some water. Look, nothing in the pail but ice."

It was hours before the necessary wood was in,and the water, to do over night. For the pump must be thawed with boiling water which she had in the teakettle ready.

The ashes were to be taken from the stoves, too. These she scattered along the path to the pump to cover the ice. The horses should all be led to the water trough. They hadn't had a drink since the day before but she shrank from that task. I guess I'm a coward,she thought, but I must do it, I must. She chopped the ice from the trough and pumped it full of water.

Back in the stable she walked resolutely in behind the horses and up beside them. She knew the routine well. Bonnar and Minnie and Mollie she turned loose. They would go get a drink and come back in the stalls, but she must lead the colts; and what if they broke away from her and

ran off with their halter straps dragging, or maybe they would crush her against the wall? After the trained ones were gone, she went up behind and in beside the most spirited colt of the lot, untied it and without a falter she led it out to the trough, let it drink and took it back. The others led the same way. It was not until they were all tied in securely again that she broke down and began sobbing. They seemed to understand, she thought, and dried her eyes before going back out in the cold.

It was dark when she came inside again, the short day had flown. Now, she must clean and light the lamp for she was too tired and her head ached too badly to even think of pumping the gas lamp. She lit the lamp then and filled the stoves with the coal that Jerry had brought from town for the night fires and set the kettle of soup on the stove, that Glory had made the day before. How tired she was! How her head ached!

She stooped over the lounge watching the little boys turn their heads from side to side and a horror filled her. Why didn't someone come? Why hadn't they seen her flag? Mr. Bradford knew that Glory was sick. Why hadn't he come by? What would she do? She took little Annie in her arms and found that she, too, was burning with fever. The babe's head lay heavy on Marion's arm. She sat down in the big chair hugging the tiny form tight in her arms.

I will rest a wee bit, she though, then I'll wake them all up for their medicine and some of the soup. She wrapped Glory's heavy plaid shawl around herself and the

babe and dropped immediately to sleep. She did not hear the cows lowing in the barn nor the horses stamping for their evening oats. She did not hear Buster who sat on the door step and howled. She did not know when the lamp burned dry and went out nor when the fires died down and frost began to creep in around the doors and windows nor did she hear the car stop outside and the kind voice which spoke to Buster.

Marion was not aware of the two men who came inside and their shocked voices when they looked about the room and saw what had taken place.

"Lucky thing, Bradford knowing about these folks," one of them said.

"And I was for going back across the lake," the other whistled.

"Listen to that little girl rave. What is she saying? Something about a potato. Afraid the potatoes will freeze in the cellar, maybe. Or is she talking about her nose? They're all delerious. I never seen nothing like it in all my life."

"We will have to make two loads of it," the older man said. "You go ahead with the children. I'll stop here, put on the fires and feed th' stock and wait for you to come back. Fetch in them blankets, son." He walked around the bed by the light of his flashlight. "Well, what do you know? This is Jerry O'Malley. I never knew he lived out this way."

They wrapped the children in the warm blankets from

the beds first, then, for double protection, they rolled the cold ones from the car over these. Carried them all out placing them in the two seats of the close curtained car and the younger man drove off in the darkness with the Aurora Borealis spreading a white sheet across the northern sky to swing and dance as if it were on guard over the children on this long, cold, dark ride, alone with the stranger.

The confusion awoke Jerry who spoke weakly as the man came in.

"That you, Jack? What's going on here?"

"Bradford told us there was sickness here," he turned the glare of his flash light away from Jerry's face, "but I never dreamed it was like this. There wasn't a one of you able to give the other a drink of water."

He soon had a roaring fire in each stove. Then, he went to the stable to take care of the stock and there he found Marion's flag where it had blown to the ground.

The wind moaned and dashed dirt against the house from Jerry's smooth plowed fields. Coyotes set up their dismal howling agin and Buster, in answer, lifted his nose to the dim moon and wailed his heart out in utter loneliness.

And to make the night more weird, a Jack-O-Lantern took up his lone walk over towards the lake, his light glowing red in the darkness.

Chapter 6
Happy Ever After.

Nodwell

Marion was back in her bed again. She lay quite still, not daring to open her eyes--not yet. How long had she tossed about out there on the lake in that boat without any oars? It must have been months--and all the time she had been cold, cold. But had she really been on the lake or did she just imagine it? She certainly had been somewhere. She was nice and warm now, and the pillow was soft.

This was not her own bed, she was sure of that. She venutred a peek. Why, she must be in the church in town, and it was full of cots--cots with sick folks on them, many of them. Then she heard Mr. White speak her name. It was so strange being here and Mr. White being here--then she remembered. She remembered the day when all of the family came down with the flu and she tried to take care of them and do the work too. She remembered how the little boys lay so white and now their heads kept turning on their pillows, and a sob broke from her throat.

"She seems to be conscious," Mr. White said, leaning over the cot. "You have company, my dear. Open your eyes. See who is here."

As if by magic both Glory and Jerry stood there leaning over her too, both a bit pale but theywere both smiling.

"We drove in to see you in the cutter," Glory said. "Everybody is well again, all but you, and I believe now that you will be home soon. It snowed, Marion. The flu is almost finished."

"You were a grand girl that day, Marion," Jerry's voice was husky, "taking care of everything like you did but

it did you harm. You've been sick long enough." He patted her head, "how do you feel?"

"I feel grand now that I'm back--but I guess I wasn't anywhere else but here was I?"

"No, dear, nowhere else," Glory said softy. "Hear those sleigh bells?"

"Yes, I do, " Marion smiled weakly, "and I'm that glad it snowed. But now I'm awfully sleepy."

In a few days they took Marion home and put her to bed on the lounge.

"Potato nose is sick too." She had been talking all the time since she got home to the little boys and John who sat on the edge of the lounge beside here. "He's still sick. I took him a drink of water the first day I got up and walked. He called me 'daughter' when he thanked me. Tears dripped from her long eyelashes. "And when I left they had a curtain around his cot, that means he was worse." There was a knock and Jerry opened the door.

It was Mr. White who came in and he looked like a snow man with the snow beaten into his warm fur coat for a wind had whipped up which picked the dry snow up in scoop fulls and swirled it to the sky, and in the cutter from the livery barn there was no protection from it.

After shaking hands all around, he stood by the stove and pulled ice from his eyelashes but he refused to sit down.

"I must not stop long enough for this snow to melt," he said. "I have other missions to fulfill. But I came here first, carrying good tidings as well as sad." He laid a long yellowed envelope on the table. "Here, Jerry, is your

mortgage back. The banker, I'm sorry to say, passed away soon after you took Marion out of the hospital." He laid another envelope down, "and this is his will. He left near everything to Marion. He told me that she was the only person in the Province of Alberta who had nerve to speak the truth to him. He wants you to manage this for her. The herd of angus is your's and the Hudson Bay lease, he turned over to you. There is money in the bank for you also. He wants that new house built next summer--and well furnished. He wants a piano and lessons for Marion at once. I have Murphey's mortgage back for him also. In fact, he returned each mortgage to the original owner--it was a very touching passing and I feel that he is safe with the Savior at this minute. He had one fault--his lust for money; but he gave it all back and more. Now I must bid you goodday, and God bless you."

"But," Jerry stood with the envelope in his hand unable to believe what was taking place, "this overwhelms me--I haven't words."

"No words are needed my boy." Mr. White turned at the door, "Thank our dear Father in Heaven. Human hands are weak when it comes to war and illness--it takes him to straighten things out. McNab has atoned."

"We called him names," Marion sobbed to John, "how cruel of us."

But Mr. White heard her. "Have no regrets my dear child," he said. "Just offering him that drink of water melted all the ice around his heart. He died a very happy man. He said, 'Thank God for that little girl. She is

worthy of all I have to leave her.' And it's quite a fortune you have, my dear, I congratulate you. Indeed, I do."

He went out then and they all listened to the sweet tinkle of his Swiss sleigh bells until the rising wind dashed the sound away. It continued to rise and roar. It whistled around the corner of the shack. It lifted loose shingles on the roof and made them flutter and squeal but this did not strike terror in their hearts any more for all they had to do now was wait. Wait for spring and the thaw so they could begin to build. Jerry and Glory sat and held hands across the table, wonder and gladness in their eyes. Buster set up a mournful howling on the door step and Jerry let him inside.

"I can't realize it," Glory said humbly, "how all this could happen to us. I can't."

"I can rest now," Marion sighed. "After all these years we can be happy again, like when I was a little girl. And we have all winter to decide what we want in the catalogue."

"Do you think it was our magic word?" John suggested. "Nellie said the other day that it took lots of courage to believe that you--that you would--I mean--if you came home."

"I know," Marion murmured sleepily, "and all the time I was in the boat I kept thinking of it. Courage I would say--I must have courage."

"Marion what do you mean about being on the lake?" Glory and Jerry had come to the old lounge where she lay. "You kept talking about it when you were sick and about a

magic word."

"I guess I must of dreamed it," Marion answered, "but I seemed to be in our boat and the wind whipped me around and I lost the oars and white caps tossed foam on me and I couldn't get to shore. Then all of a sudden there I was, on a cot in the church, and potato--I mean Mr. McNab was on the next cot, just awfully sick, poor man--and soon as I could stand up I gave him a glass of my water--and--and--"

"There now, don't make yourself feel badly," Glory said kindly. "You were out of your head just, and cold. Fever makes one cold you know. And we best all be off from here and let her sleep. She's fair done in." Glory tucked her silk crzy quilt under Marion's chin patting her softly. "And you need have no more worry dear for like Mr. White said, God has provided a way for us at last. Still, it <u>is</u> sad that the poor man--there now, go to sleep."

"I'm <u>that</u> happy to be home in the warm little shack," Marion sighed. Then, she was asleep.

The End.